Longtermers’ wait for life

For some, same crime means much more time

By JAMES MINTON
Baker-Zachary bureau

ANGOLA — Moreese Bickham killed two St. Tammany Parish sheriff’s deputies in 1958 and was sentenced to die. These days, the 71-year-old Louisiana State Penitentiary inmate tends 14 rose bushes in two beds near the prison’s administration building.

“That’s my job. They told me, ‘if you want that, do it to suit yourself,’” Bickham said. Twice a year, he prunes other roses along “the walk” at the main prison complex.

Bickham will have been imprisoned 31 years in July. Now serving a life sentence, he had seven stays of execution before the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1972 ruling that the death penalty as then imposed was unconstitutional. He once came within 15 hours of the electric chair.

He said the confrontation with the deputies was linked to his being a black living in a white neighborhood, and the Ku Klux Klan “laid down some talk” to discourage neighbors from testifying on his behalf.

Bickham has had three heart attacks, three operations for other ailments and suffers from high blood pressure and poor circulation in one leg.

An ordained Methodist minister, “Pops” Bickham is a member of Louisiana’s exclusive “Million Dollar Club.” According to a National Council on Crime and Delinquency study, each inmate incarcerated for 30 years costs the taxpayers more than $1 million.

Prison journalist Ron Wikberg’s 1988 research showed there were 30 other current or soon-to-be inducted members of Bickham’s circle at Angola. In a lengthy article in The Angolite, the prison news magazine’s associate editor profiled the 31 “longtermers” whose terms had exceeded 25 years, pointing out numerous examples of other inmates convicted of similar crimes who were freed years ago.

Wikberg later assisted Burk Foster, a University of Southwestern Louisiana criminal justice professor, in preparing a condensed version of the article to present last March at the annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences in Washington, D.C.

By then, the number had been reduced to 25, but the two said there are several hundred other potential Million Dollar Club members waiting in the wings.

“Somehow these old men have managed to beat the odds, but in reverse,” Foster wrote. “They have ‘slipped through the cracks’ and stayed in prison while their partners in crime got out and resumed their lives in the free world.”

Foster and Wikberg found that one or a combination of...
Hopelessness haunts ‘longtimers’

BY CHARLES GERALD

A week later, a 19-year-old woman arrived at the Lincoln Parish Sheriff’s Office in Ruston, Bolivia, to report that her husband had been raped. She said he had been held captive for several days and was too scared to speak. The officer on duty immediately contacted the Louisiana State Police for assistance.

The police officer arrived at the scene and found the victim was a 27-year-old man who had been beaten and sexually assaulted. He had been left for dead on the side of the road.

The officer called for paramedics, who arrived and took the victim to the hospital. He was treated for his injuries and released.

Inmate #2345-6789, a 35-year-old man, was found dead in his cell at the Angola Penitentiary in St. Landry Parish. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

The inmate had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 15 years. He had requested a transfer to a minimum security facility, but his request was denied.

Inmate #4567-8901, a 56-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 20 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #1234-5678, a 42-year-old man, was found dead in his cell at the Angola Penitentiary. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 17 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #9876-5432, a 63-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #8765-4321, a 33-year-old man, was found dead in his cell at the Angola Penitentiary. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Gardner Collins, 42, a life prisoner who had been at Angola for 20 years, was also found dead in his cell. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 20 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #7654-3210, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #6543-2109, a 44-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #5432-1098, a 34-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 15 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #4321-0987, a 55-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 26 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #3210-9876, a 64-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 28 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #2109-8765, a 45-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 23 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #1098-7654, a 37-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 21 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #9876-5432, a 63-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #8765-4321, a 33-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #7654-3210, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #6543-2109, a 44-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #5432-1098, a 55-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 26 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #4321-0987, a 64-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 28 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #3210-9876, a 45-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 23 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #2109-8765, a 37-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #1098-7654, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #9876-5432, a 63-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #8765-4321, a 33-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #7654-3210, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #6543-2109, a 44-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #5432-1098, a 55-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 26 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #4321-0987, a 64-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 28 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #3210-9876, a 45-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 23 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #2109-8765, a 37-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #1098-7654, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #9876-5432, a 63-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #8765-4321, a 33-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #7654-3210, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #6543-2109, a 44-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 25 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #5432-1098, a 55-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 26 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #4321-0987, a 64-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 28 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #3210-9876, a 45-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 23 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #2109-8765, a 37-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 12 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.

Inmate #1098-7654, a 21-year-old man, was also found dead in his cell at Angola. He had been serving a life sentence for murder and had been at Angola for 10 years. The cause of death was determined to be suicide.